

Proposed freeway is not the solution

By Ralph Guariglio

This is not about "Ahwatukee vs. the rest of the world." This is about doing what is right for the long term for the largest number of people while negatively impacting the smallest number of people. This is about solving traffic and pollution problems. And it's about doing it the right way going forward, using new ideas and updated planning techniques rather than a 20-year-old drawing.

There is no question that the Valley needs a solution(s) to its freeway congestion, but it is incredibly obvious that aligning the 202 along Pecos Road is NOT that solution. The consequences clearly outweigh the benefits, and there are too many options and alternatives that have not been explored or publicly acknowledged.

By now, it's obvious to everyone that this alignment would be an interstate traffic bypass. That means we would merely take a portion of the pollution and traffic congestion from where it is now and spread it across South Mountain Park, through Avondale, Laveen, Tolleson, Estrella Village, etc. and into Ahwatukee, over homes, schools, shopping centers, churches, community centers and parks. This alignment is not the answer.

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pollution. No amount of studies done on the benefits of this freeway can justify the exchange for human health.

Matt Burdick's (ADOT) statement, "We've always built freeways near schools and never heard of any problems" is, as is obvious, a political answer to the question of pollution and safety when building a freeway within literally only a few feet of schools. His comment carries no weight and no merit. Just because "this is the way we've always done it" doesn't make it right.

Further, at a breakfast meeting with Governor Napolitano (Jan. 17), she was asked who is actively pursuing alternatives to the SM 202. Her answer was ADOT. I can tell you that at the Jan. 6 South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team meeting (ADOT and FHWA in attendance) there were no discussions of any other options, nor have there been any such discussions to this point.

old transportation plan?

Let's really consider our alternatives. First, for interstate bypass traffic, routes are already in place. State Route 85 comes off I-10 near Buckeye, goes to Gila Bend and hooks up with I-8, which connects to I-10. By improving SR 85 (maybe making it "Interstate 85"), it takes the interstate traffic off the Valley freeways and alleviates some of the congestion and pollution. It also brings economic growth to Gila Bend, especially considering their 55,000 new homes (plus businesses) slated for the very near future.

Now, for a real paradigm shift, we must consider mass transit. The \$1.3B construction budget plus an undetermined amount of dollars for property acquisition and relocation would make a huge stride forward toward enhancing citywide mass transit. With cost overruns, which are inevitable, and a worldwide concrete shortage, the cost of this project will skyrocket. Trains and buses are the future. We all love our cars but when gas is \$5 per gallon, how often do you really want to fill up that 12 mpg Suburban?

Additionally, the extreme close proximity to schools will subject thousands of students, plus faculty and staff to concentrated air pollution, having extreme negative health effects. Studies show this would severely hamper lung development in young children, and anyone with asthma or other respiratory diseases would also be thrown in harm's way.

According to the *Journal of the Air and Waste Management Association*, hazardous particle concentration will be 30 times greater than it is today within 150 feet of the proposed freeway. Extreme ill health effects go to 300 feet and beyond. The results of a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* indicate that these levels of air pollution have "chronic, adverse effects on lung development in children from the age of 10 to 18 years, leading to clinically significant deficits in respiratory functionality as children reach adulthood."

These are only two of numerous studies showing the ill effects of air

Many of us put a lot of faith in the Gila River Indian Community having a "change of heart" and permitting the freeway to be built on their land. Even if they allow it, it could be literally only a few feet from the current proposed alignment. This is also not a viable alternative.

This proposed alignment will cut an 800-foot swath through the nation's largest municipal park and destroy the aesthetic and environmental balance of South Mountain Park. If you hike or bike or picnic there now, or just enjoy the view, that would all be lost, not to mention the impact to wildlife.

While proponents argue the freeway has been in the plan for 20 years, that is exactly the problem with it – it's extremely outdated. Our community has changed and grown immensely in that time and this plan is no longer valid or effective. We're not operating on a 20-year-old economic plan, a 20-year-old environmental plan, a 20-year-old tax plan or even a 20-year-old energy plan. How can we put stock in a 20-year-

We must also consider the government's right of eminent domain and the impact this will have on future decisions if this is allowed to go through. We must protect and exercise our constitutional right of a "government for the people, by the people" and take a strong stand for what is right. I fully agree that something needs to be done about the pollution and traffic situations in the Valley. There are many more alternatives. I urge you to get informed and get involved. Go to <http://www.southmountainfreeway.org/> and <http://www.protectazchildren.org/index.php>.

The South Mountain Freeway is NOT the solution.

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